

SOUL SPANS

Here are some bridge stories. Once an old man to whom I had not spoken for months although we were neighbors called me up in the middle of the night to help him pull in his beach stairs. Our houses were on the edge of the ocean and the ocean was furious. Out I went to meet him, in the slicing wind, and we pulled up his stairs, and I tore my hands, and shook his hand, and did not help him limp back to his house, because he was a proud and good man, as I learned later, after we met on the bridge he had made with his words.

Once I hammered a man with my fists. This was on a muddy field long ago. We punched each other until he bled and I cried with rage and exhaustion and we were pulled apart by other men. I saw him the next day in the street. We hated each other and then he smiled. His smile was a bridge that shamed me.

Recently a friend of mine died. He was 23. I wrote a letter to his mother about his hands, which were enormous and deft. She wrote back: a small gray card, a few quiet words, her name. The card was a bridge between despair and peace.

Recently my wife was very sick. She lay in her hospital bed like a rag. She was in a pale country far from me. I kissed her with a joke in my mouth, desperate for her smile. She smiled. The leap of her lips was a bridge between lovers.

Once, long ago, when I was a small boy, I wrote a letter to my mother and left it under her plate on Mother's Day. It was a letter from Hell, refusing her admission. My father sent this letter to a small magazine, which published it and sent me a check for \$10. I still have that check. It is the bridge by which I became a writer.

This morning I ate breakfast with my daughter. She is an angel with an attitude, two years old. Suddenly she turned and kissed me on the nose. Her kiss was made of cinnamon and milk and it was a bridge to my hoary heart.

We are bound, you and I, by ink and paper and a university high above a river. I sit here and tell you about myself; back come your stories, sad and merry and honest. It is a curious conversation, poignant and surprising. I am moved by it. It is a gift and a lesson. It is a bridge.

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Brian Doyle, Editor

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